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The Substance of Style

Six classic styles to help you define your home's architecture

By Janice Brewster

Choosing a log home style is a little like buying a sofa. For the sofa, you enter the furniture store or flip through a catalog and are amazed at the sheer number of sofa styles available: overstuffed or formal, solid color or patterned, long and lean or prim and high-backed. When you get ready to choose a log home style, you'll be faced with a similar multitude of options. Your home can be formal or informal, Western or Appalachian, a mountain resort or a ranch home. Only your imagination (and budget) limit the choices.

To help narrow down the field, we've defined six classic log home styles with the help of architects and designers. They've pinpointed the elements of these styles and have words of wisdom for creating a distinct style for your home.

Architectural styles typically evolve in response to local climates. Does this mean that a mountain-style home won't look right on a flat site? Maybe; maybe not. It does mean that if you and your designer understand your region's precipitation, temperatures and wind patterns—and build accordingly—your home will last longer and be more comfortable. Taking cues from an established style will help your home look pulled together, too.





1

Rocky Mountain Log Homes photo



2

Photo by Laurie Dickson



3

Photo by Don Kerkhof



6

Horita Homes USA Inc. photo by Roger Wade



4

Photo by J.K. Lawrence



5

Alpine Log Homes photo by Roger Wade

Clockwise from top: 1. Mountain 2. Ranch 3. Early American 4. Adirondack 5. Storybook Cottage 6. Pacific Northwest



Early American log homes are straightforward, even boxy, with squared-off logs. They usually feature dovetail corners and wide chinking.

Early American Style

The Look: Weathered, but steeped in tradition and aged to perfection.

Log Style: Early settlers who had the time and skill hewed their logs square and fitted them together with dovetail corners. "All our logs are square cut and hand-hewn," says Ferris Robinson of Walden 19th Century Antique Log Homes in Lookout Mountain, Tennessee. The company "harvests" their logs from old barns and homes around the Southeast, then uses them to build new homes for their clients.

Walden fills the gaps between logs with old-fashioned cement mortar chinking. A penetrating stain on the logs protects the wood surface while keeping the weathered gray patina intact.

Essential Elements: Early American homes follow straightforward, boxy styles. You can have an authentic look with one or two stories. Rooflines are fairly simple, too, but dormers, in doghouse or shed style, add character to flat roof planes. Humdrum asphalt shingles will ruin the effect of an historic-style home. Instead, pick slate or a metal roof in silver, green or brown. Cedar shakes are an option, but only if your climate will allow them. In a wet or humid area, Ferris says, wood roofs can suffer.

Openings: Creating an authentic-looking Early American home requires windows with divided lights instead of picture windows. "Those scream, 'modern,'" Ferris says. Rectangular-shaped windows help set the scene. "We never put in an

arch or Palladian," she explains. "It just doesn't go with those straight lines."

Window trim in white, green or dark brown can offer a nice contrast to the wood tones of the logs. Ken Muth of Pennsylvania's Wood Natural Restorations says springing for custom-made windows is the key to creating an authentic aged look.

Set off the front entry with a door in a contrasting color, as well. Look for heavy door hardware in a matte or brushed finish. "The right hardware can make any door look old," Ferris says. Outlining the door with small-paned sidelights and a transom overhead adds an authentic touch.

Interior: Although Early American homes were tight quarters, new home owners aren't bound to repeat history. Interiors can be open and casual, or divided into more distinct formal rooms. Either way, the fireplace tends to be the focal point of the home. And, Ferris says, a large fireplace is an expense that's worth every penny because it balances the solid look of the log walls. "Substantial rock work is important to carry the weight of the logs," she says, "especially if you have a lot of beams and posts."

Sage Advice: Look for historic home plans in a shape and form that looks original to your area. Two-story Colonials are prevalent in some areas, while saltbox homes appear in other regions and, in

some parts of the country, dogtrot-style homes are the rule.

Watch where you place the hearth, Ken cautions. In early Northeastern homes, the fireplace was always placed in the center of the home, while Southern settlers often set the chimney on an exterior wall.

Adirondack Style

The Look: Rustic Victorian decorated with charm by Mother Nature.

Log Style: Full round, handcrafted logs with intersecting corners were used to build the Adirondack Great Camps, says Ron De Lair of Wareham De Lair Architects in Saranac Lake, New York. To highlight the "natural" style, the bark was even left intact on some home's logs.

Twigs, branches and small logs were woven into decorative railings on the homes, as well. "One of the things I think is appropriate is rustication of railing work," Ron says.

Essential Elements: "Adirondack style is very eclectic," Ron says. If a home owner is taken with the Alpine style

Adirondack-style homes tend to be eclectic, but there are some defining features. Often, the bark will be left on the logs and any railings will be made of twigs and branches.



found in Europe, that can be brought to Adirondack style. If a more Western look is the goal, that can work, too.

Still, some similarities hold true: "Certainly, porches were always part of Adirondack 'camps,'" he says. Nowadays, these porches tend to be screened against black flies and mosquitoes.

Gable roofs were the easiest to build and are still part of the style. Wood shakes can be used as roofing, thanks to flame retardants that are now applied to the shakes.

Openings: Windows in the Adirondack style are divided into smaller panes, sometimes by grilles that create diamond shapes.

"Because porches often rimmed the perimeter, the interior spaces were dark," Ron says. "The camps had secondary means of light from eyebrow windows, dormers or gable-end lights." If you plan to wrap porches around your Adirondack-style home, you'll need to consider ways to bring natural light inside.

Door styles within the Adirondack look run the gamut, from paneled to plank to those decorated with branches or bark. Some feature leaded glass. "It's one area where you can make a statement freely," Ron says.

Whatever door or windows you choose, trim them in cranberry red or a rich blue-tinted green for a most authentic Adirondack look.

Interior: Originally fashioned as vacation resorts for the wealthy, these so-called Great Camps offered fireplaces for both warmth and ambiance. "I'd be hard-pressed to imagine a camp that didn't have a fireplace," Ron says. For the fireplace in your Great Camp, choose a type of rock that appeals to you. For an authentic old-fashioned look, the mortar should be almost invisible, Ron says. "The thinner the mortar line, the better."

Great Camps with second floors typically featured balconies or catwalks accented with more rustic twig work. Including this type of detail in your home is a surefire way to evoke the style.

Sage Advice: Small details make a difference. For instance, if you plan to include natural materials, such as bark

and twigs, they should be used in a way that highlights their character while still protecting them from the elements. A professional designer will help you fine-tune your Adirondack home. "The details and the proportions are important," Ron says.

Pacific Northwest Style

The Look: Handcrafted and solid, with linear forms and an Asian influence.

Log Style: "The old log cabins have corners that are pulled in," says Washington architect Jean Steinbrecher. Because exposed log ends can draw in

moisture in the damp Northwest, dovetail notches or even corner posts are more practical

than extended corners. "It's responsive to the climate," Jean says.

Essential Elements: Broad roof overhangs are a trademark of Northwest style. "Lazy porches" with shallow roof pitches are another, Jean says. "It's a place to hang your dripping raincoat and leave your muddy boots," she explains.

Because more temperate climates bring less snow, roof pitches can be flatter. While the roofing material of choice was once cedar shakes, many people now choose concrete tile, architectural grade composition shingles, or metal roofing, Jean says. She takes care not to create north-facing roof planes that can lead to moss growth.

Purlins or ridgepoles sometimes peek out from under the roof on the exterior, but overhangs should protect them. "They can't protrude, or they'll rot," Jean says.

Look for shingle details, too, to break up the look of logs on the home's exterior.

Openings: In an area with many overcast days, windows become vital for bringing light indoors. "People designed these homes to suck in as much light as possible," Jean says. Open floorplans lure

daylight deep inside. Drywall on ceilings behind log beams will bounce light back into the room.

Windows in Northwest-style homes show their Arts and Crafts pedigree with rectilinear grill patterns. Casements topped with transoms follow the look. Exterior trim around the windows and doors is simple and often highlighted with shades of green or rust.

Interior: A large fireplace can be the center and focal point for an open floorplan. "We have such beautiful stone here—lots of variety," Jean says. From fieldstone to glacial boulders, home owners can find a stone type that appeals to them and fits the Northwest style.

Sage Advice: "Don't build this style in snow country," Jean warns. Flat roofs and heavy snow loads just don't mix. If you're building in the Northwest, or another equally rainy climate, "pay special attention to water issues," she says. "We need gutters and we use them." Instead of downspouts, which may look awkward on a log home, Jean uses heavy rain chains to lead water down from gutters.

Mountain Style

The Look: Rustic, but refined, with rooflines that echo the mountain peaks.

Log Style: Whether they're squared



Since Pacific Northwest-style homes don't have to stand up to heavy snow loads, they're designed with roofs that have flatter pitches. They also feature numerous windows and open floorplans to bring in light on overcast days.

"Small details make a difference."



Mountain-style homes usually have steep roofs to shed snow, and lots of windows set high in the walls to provide better views of the scenery.

or round, logs used in mountain-style homes tend to be large for extra protection from the cold.

Essential Elements: Steep roof pitches help keep too much snow from piling up. The roof on a mountain home looks heavy, too, in part because it must offer a good deal of insulation, and because it must be strong enough to shoulder heavy snow loads.

A home's porches often will have a shallower roof pitch to allow for light and views on the inside. "The porch protects you from weather and allows you to have indoor/outdoor living," says David Gibson, an architect with offices in Aspen

and Telluride. The porch also helps set the tone. "They're the hallmark of the style," he says. "If you had a log home without a porch, it would be like a fish out of water."

Openings: In mountain resort communities, the most valued commodity is the view. So, while small-paned windows look authentically old, you'll want plenty of glass to see the mountains. "We try to combine small with big," David says. "You get the intimacy of the small panes and the grandeur of the big view."

Windows set high in the walls define mountain style, too. "You don't want to cut off the horizon line," David explains. "If the windows end at 8 feet, you'll feel like you're in a closet."

Interior: A mountain home's floorplan can be formal or informal, but resort homes tend to be more open and casual. One common denominator is the hearth. "You really have to include a stone fireplace," David says.

"You already have a lot of wood, so the stone helps make a statement."

Whether you set the fireplace on an exterior wall or on the inside is your call. "Proponents of exterior wall placement like to look at the view and look at the fire," David says. An interior placement will put the fireplace at the heart of the house. "Neither school has won the day," he says. "There's a good following for both choices."

"The porch helps set the tone."

Keep in mind that many mountain communities have put restrictions on wood burning. Gas fireplaces offer a safe and convenient alternative.

Sage Advice: "When designing, you have to think of where the snow is going to dump," Jean says. Snow sliding down roof valleys can create an avalanche below that can block doorways or lead to snow banks that sit against log walls and cause deterioration.

Ranch Style

The Look: Rugged and utilitarian, with a wide-open sense of welcome.

Log Style: Round logs with overlapping corners went up fairly quickly for Old West pioneers who needed to build quickly. Back then, building a home "wasn't about making a statement," says architect Paul Froncek of Massachusetts, "it was about getting out of the rain." If there was time, logs might be squared and fit together with dovetail notches. You could use either style today for a ranch home.

Essential Elements: A classic ranch has one long roof ridge, with a fairly shallow pitch. "It has a real horizontal

A single, long roof ridge and wraparound porches define the typical ranch-style home. Inside, the homes tend to be open and casual, but a stone fireplace is a must.



sense," Paul says. Metal roofs are a wise pick for standing up to the hot sun and creating that authentic "miner's shack" look, according to Paul.

"It's different from a farmhouse," Paul says of ranch style. "It has a communal feeling." Wide wraparound porches permit entry into the home at a number of places. "I picture tying the horse up to a hitching post at the bedroom door or the kitchen door," Paul says.

Openings: Ranch homes traditionally were dark inside. Old windows were smaller and were shaded by the porch. Today, you can gang together smaller windows with divided panes to achieve an authentic look, while still bringing in plenty of light.

Paul has designed homes where part of the porch is enclosed with windows. The space inside becomes livable year-round, while the style of the wraparound porch is preserved.

At the entry, you might pick a plain door in keeping with the style. "Try a really simple plank door that's wide and low," recommends Paul. An authentic ranch would never have a formal double door. "Ranch-style doors weren't anything fancy," he notes.

Interior: The interior of a ranch should be open and casual—part dining hall and part bunkroom. The early ranches were working spaces, after all, where ranch hands came in to eat and sit a spell.

Today, this feeling translates well into an informal home with plenty of space for families to get together and enjoy their surroundings. "I like the continuity between inside and out; the weaving together of indoor and outdoor spaces," Paul says.

Sage Advice: While a type of ranch house can be found in almost any suburb of the United States, the style really looks best on level land. "Ranch style is appropriate for flat terrain," Paul advises.

Storybook Cottage Style

The Look: Romancing the logs with charm and whimsy.

Log Style: A variety of log styles, even within the same home, keep this style interesting to the eye, says designer Robbin Obamsawin of Beaver Creek Log



To accent their gingerbread look, storybook cottage-style homes often feature a variety of materials, including stone, shingles and unique front doors.

Homes in Oneida, New York. Beaver Creek's logsmiths have mixed round logs with square timbers, and dovetail corners on round logs.

Essential Elements: Thinking beyond logs will add another layer to this intricate style. Stone, shingles and board-and-batten provide a visual and tactile break from solid log walls. "We love the interplay of materials," Robbin says. "And there are a million combinations that will create the gingerbread look."

Varied pitches keep rooflines lively. "There are dramatic changes," Robbin says. "It's an over-exaggeration; a cartoon."

As with many architectural styles for log homes, porches play a leading role in the storybook scheme. "We use lots of porches," Robbin says. "We love that Americana sense of living life outdoors. There's something so romantic about the American porch."

Openings: A mix of window styles and shapes, from arched to eyebrow to casement to French doors, charm the storybook home. Divided panes can reveal sunrise patterns or geometric shapes.

A special front door is an absolute must. "You can have a perfect log home and the wrong door can kill it in a second," Robbin says. The theme that influences your storybook house will determine the type of door you choose, whether it's classical, hand-carved,


Victorian or Arts and Crafts. Even a simplistic door will work as long as it ties into the details that play throughout the rest of your home. Screen doors need attention too since they're the outermost layer. Try twig art on the screen to complete the Hansel and Gretel-vision of your storybook cottage.

Interior: The charm of storybook style doesn't stop at the front door. "You need to have enough log work on the inside to balance out the weight of the walls," Robbin says. "If you don't have enough joists, columns and posts, it wimps out."

Layers of trim inside and thoughtful attention to detail are key ingredients. Arches reinforce the style, but can be difficult to execute. Designing one or two arches in key places in the home is sufficient, Robbin says.

Sage Advice: "People tend to put a lot of time into the interior," Robbin says, but they may not pay attention to how the finished home will look outside. Careful thought and deliberate planning will pay off in a home that truly epitomizes this charming look.

And, while this style seems best suited for modest-sized homes, there are castles as well as cottages in most storybooks. You can make the look work in a larger home, Robbin says, but you'll need a hefty budget to ensure the level of detail the storybook style requires.

Creating a style for your home is a process that requires more than just assessing your personal taste. You must take into account the architectural styles in your region as well as the weather pattern and climate your log home will face each season. But whichever style you choose—whether it's a simple and boxy Early American abode or a quirky and cartoonish storybook cottage—don't forget to add in a dash of your own unique touch to truly make your new house a one-of-a-kind home. 

Janice Brewster is the author of Log Cabins and Cabin Style. She writes from her home in Arlington, Virginia. If you have a question for Janice, write her in care of Log Home Living, 4125 Lafayette Center Drive, Suite 100, Chantilly VA 20151, or e-mail janicebrewster@loghomeliving.com.